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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

APRIL 2001

APRIL HAPPENINGS

The April meeting of the Hancock County Historical Society will be held on Thursday, April 19 at the Lobrano House, 108 Cue Street, Bay Saint Louis.

Our guest speakers will be Celestine Labat, Veronica Labat and Mary E. Labat.

Telephone 467-4090 for reservations at \$6.00. We are expecting a maximum crowd, so please call early to help us plan seating and menu. Thank you.

HAPPENINGS

* * * *

The Historical Society has chartered a luxury bus to attend the Splendors of Spain Exhibit in Jackson. The bus will depart at 8 a.m. on Wednesday, June 13 and return about 6 p.m. We will have lunch in Jackson before the exhibit. We are still negotiating the cost but expect it to be very reasonable. Please call 467-4090 for further details and reservations.

(Note: I went to see the exhibit a couple of weeks ago and it was wonderful. I am going back. Please join us. Charles Gray)

* * *

We are pleased (thrilled, in fact) to announce that the long-awaited plans to refinish the floors at Lobrano House are underway. Rick and JoAnn Mumme George volunteered to sand

Continued on page 3



Celestine Labat at a recent function at the Hancock County Library in Bay Saint Louis

INSIDE A HOUSE ON EASTERBROOK

... they call her "Teeny" because she is but five feet tall and then she has to be standing in shoes with thick heels. She weighs less than a hundred pounds and carries in those less than hundred pounds all the days of her century and then some years . . .

Celestine Labat.

It's a nice name and it seemed to fit the small baby born in the Bay on a warm November day in 1898. In a way she was lucky. The house where she was born had originally been a small three-room cottage with a detached kitchen. Her father had bought it some ten years before for \$35 and, being a carpenter,

enlarged it to fit the growing family.

Celestine was one of 13 children, 11 of whom would grow up and form the core of a family that would become a valuable asset to Bay St. Louis.

Today, the roll call of Labats includes prominent educators, businessmen, doctors, and lawyers. Of the 11 children, six would obtain college degrees and all would pass on their work ethics to their children and their children's children.

But it's Celestine we are talking about.

Celestine. It is a nice name, but they call her "Teeny" because she is but

but five feet tall and then she has to be standing in shoes with thick heels. She weights less than a hundred pounds and carries in those less than hundred pounds all the days of her century plus years.

The years are all there, layered in the stories that unfold with a soft rhythm as she speaks. You can sit and talk to her and she will give you some of her raisin and pecan cake and tell you stories . . . Sit. Sit and listen.

Celestine Labat.

"We used to have a house on the beach near Felicity Street. I loved it cause my sister Portia taught me to swim. On Sundays, my older sister, Portia, would get us all dressed up to meet the people that would come on the excursion train from New Orleans to visit for the day. She made our clothes and would make sure we look all clean and bright and neat for our friends that would come . . ."

Portia is gone now but she is still there, one of the many whispers in the cottage where Celestine and her sister, Veronica, a young octogenarian live by themselves.

Portia is a strong whisper, a spirit-like presence, heavily influencing many of the stories of their growing up in a small coastal town on a large shallow bay of the Mississippi Sound. So is Inez, the oldest sister then became the matriarch of the 11 children born in the small house. Inez, whose bronze bust created by James Richmond Barthé, sits in a small front room filled with hundred-year-old furniture. She's there too.

And so are others, sit and wait they will come.

Look around. Knock on a piece of molding or some of the imposing furniture. Wait a bit and a story will come walking out dressed in the clothes of another time, a time that we will never really know as well as

we do when we hear the words and the music in the words that are in the stories that Celestine tells.

Celestine Labat.

" . . . The full set of dishes in that cabinet serve twelve. We can't get all the dishes in there; there are too many and some are too big . . ."

They're English, more than a hundred years old, and their blue glaze is lovely. The cabinet they're in is also nice. And so are the two four-poster beds that the sisters sleep in. They have their own rooms now that everyone else has gone from the old house.

Her father was what today we would call a contractor and he built a great many of the area's houses and churches of the time, including St. Rose de Lima. St. Rose is just a few blocks away from the house and is one of those pleasant places to visit that both relaxes a person's spirit and their body.

The furniture, like the china, form odd groupings about the house; some are massive, some delicate. One of the four posters is huge and didn't fit the slant in the ceiling of the room it was in and the posts have been cut to adjust to the ceiling's heights. No matter, it looks nice there.

Celestine Labat.

" . . . that big wardrobe. We used to play hide-and-seek and hide in the clothes in there. You could get more than one of us . . ."

Celestine hasn't spent all of her life in Bay St. Louis. She's traveled, getting a Bachelor of Science degree in Washington, DC, and a Masters in Education in California. She taught science for many years, spending much of this time in Vicksburg.

But now she lives in the small house on Easterbrook, next to a

small cleaners run by her grand nephews, and about a block north of the train depot. A useful walking distance, if the New Orleans excursion trains still ran.

" . . . We had a horse and a cow and chickens out there in the back and a pig that they killed by piercing its heart to make blood sausage. They dressed it on the dining room table."

With its furniture and age, the house stands among the many old houses as almost a museum and, in fact, is on the National Register of Historical Places.

But the building, the grounds, the furniture are more than that. Together they form a place that was, and is, her family's home, a place where she was born, a place where she now lives and gardens. They form a place in which she can sit with her sister on the front porch, happy to see visitors and talk or be inside and bake.

And for us who live here with her in the small town on the shallow bay of the Mississippi Sound, she is a hidden door, a secret mirror, a magic book to another time.

But many of us find that, beyond all of these wonders, she is a lovely, wonderful person.

" . . . Did you like the cake? I made it just today."

Celestine Labat.

#

About The Author

Paul Estranza LaViolette has been an Oceanographer engaged in basic marine research for almost forty years with the government, Mississippi State University and, more recently, as a consultant with his own company.

He has done his studies aboard research ships and aircraft in most of the world's oceans, especially

in the Arctic, the Mediterranean and, more recently, the Gulf of Mexico.

His past publications have been ocean atlases, books and papers on the circulation of the world oceans and seas.

His first nonscientific book, Views from a Front Porch was published late last year. His second book, Waiting For The White Pelicans, was just released in September.

He is currently working on a third book: A Meeting Place of Waters: The Waters, Lands, Fauna and People Of The Mississippi Sound. This is scheduled to be published by Annabelle Publishing in the fall of 2001.

He lives on a beach road in Waveland, Mississippi, with his wife, Stella, their dog Jennie, and a black tomcat named Holly.

NEW MEMBERS

Mary A Ballard, Diamondhead, MS
 Richard Peterson, Diamondhead, MS
 Donald Harvill, Waveland, MS
 Sarah C. Roton, Montgomery, AL

VOLUNTEERS

The roses at Lobrano House have been spectacular for the past two weeks. Thanks to *Gather Ye Rosebuds* for planting them for us a couple of years ago. They are old garden roses dating more than one hundred years since their creation.

It would be wonderful if some member had a few minutes every week to volunteer to deadhead them and to weed the small flower beds along the fence.

MOTHER'S DAY

This is a great time to tell your mother how much you loved her cooking and provide her with a new source for you future enjoyment. Give her a copy of *The Hancock County Historical Society Heritage Cookbook*. Available from the Society at 467-4090. Price, \$13.

(Happenings from page 1)

the parlor floors – a commitment that I am sure they regretted before the end of the day – but they persevered and the results are wonderful. We thank these two long-time supporters for their very hard work.

The good news had only just begun: Patt Cucullu is refurbishing the window curtains.

Juanita Shiyou is upholstering our 1880's Victorian sofa. Her husband, Mike Shiyou is restoring a badly damaged leg on the sofa.

Meg Hilliker donated an antique tea table to us last year which we are also restoring to display the coffee and tea service that Linda and Jim Henrie donated.

The house dates from 1896 and all the furnishings are appropriate to its age. The parlor-dinning room needs only one additional piece of furniture – an oak table with a center pedestal in the dark-oak finish. We already have a matching side board and china cabinet. If you see one anywhere at a reasonable price, please let us know.

We regularly use this part of Katherine Lobrano's home as a mini-museum. With the addition of two mannequins (being loaned by Herbie Pursley and Phil LaGrange) in period dress (being loaned by Emily deMontluzin) the display will be a very interesting *tableau mort*.

Mrs. Lake Gaudin donated a 36 cup coffee maker to our kitchen appliances. We certainly will make use of this. Both guests and volunteer workers alike send their thanks for this thoughtful gift.

While noting enhancements, it would be amiss not to mention the face-lift being given to the Old Woodmen Of The World Hall beside Cedar Rest Cemetery. We send our appreciation to Dorothy and Don Brown for restoring this beautiful landmark.

And speaking of superb restorations, Carrie DaValt has restored a beautiful painting of George Mallard for the Society. Oh! Didn't I mention that this prominent Bay Saint Louis resident was the son of Prudhomme Mallard, the incredible furniture maker of New Orleans. His home was located at 412 South Beach Boulevard on the site of the present Clifford home, though the original house burned.

The best is yet to come! Mr. Mallard's granddaughter, Mrs. Patsy Ellmer of Ocean Springs has lent us for long-term display (and to be copied) a cache of glass photograph slides which her grandfather took in Bay Saint Louis between about 1900 and 1912. A quick phone call to Dr. Charles Sullivan put me in contact with Doug Mansfield at the Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College in Gautier. We will be traveling there under armed escort next week to try and get contact prints made from them for a display at Lobrano House where the DaValt-restored painting will be displayed after the room redecoration is completed.

Another great addition to Lobrano House is someone of a completely different vintage, Mrs. Kathryn Boh Morgan. Kathryn will be assisting me and Linda Henrie in the office two days each week and her talents add greatly to our ability to record and/or retrieve the details of our county's history.

Charles H. Gray

LOBRANO HOUSE HOURS

| | |
|---------|------------|
| MONDAY | 10:00 a.m. |
| through | to |
| FRIDAY | 3:00 p.m. |

Closed Noon to 1:00 p.m.

THE

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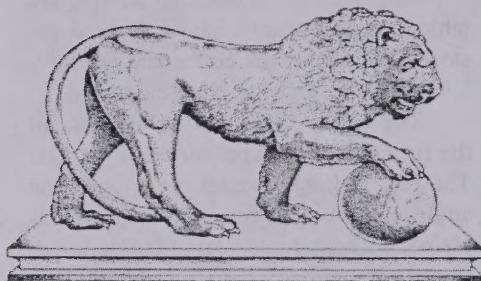
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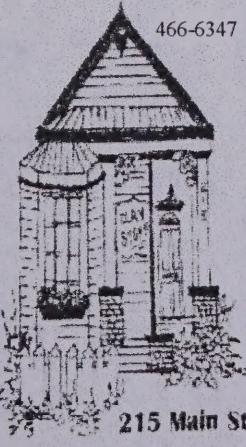
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